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U.S. Department of State

Sierra Leone Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, January 30, 1998.

SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone is controlled by a military junta. On May 25, dissident junior officers of the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF) violently seized power from the

14-month-old democratically elected Government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. The United Nations Security Council condemned the overthrow of the government and called upon the military junta to restore the elected Government unconditionally. Major Johnny Paul Koroma, awaiting trial on charges stemming from a September 1996 coup attempt, was freed from prison and named Chairman of the new Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). The AFRC immediately suspended the Constitution, banned political parties and all public demonstrations and meetings, and announced that all legislation would be made by military decree. Koroma invited the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) to join the AFRC in exercising control over the country. The RUF quickly took control of the military junta, although Koroma remains nominal Chairman of the AFRC. Rule is arbitrary; maintenance of law and order has collapsed. The judiciary, like other civil institutions, has effectively ceased to function.

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) designated the Economic Organization of West African States (ECOWAS) to bring about the restoration of the constitutional government. After ECOWAS negotiations with a joint AFRC/RUF delegation failed to make progress toward the restoration of the elected Government, ECOWAS imposed regional sanctions and an embargo against the military junta. On October 8, the United Nations Security Council imposed sanctions prohibiting the importation of

weapons, military materiel, and petroleum as well as international travel by members of the military junta. Dozens of civilians were killed in clashes between AFRC/RUF forces and the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) as ECOMOG attempted to enforce the sanctions. On October 23, AFRC/RUF and ECOWAS delegations signed a peace plan calling for the restoration to power of President Kabbah on April 22, 1998. Both President Kabbah and AFRC Chairman Koroma publicly endorsed the Conakry Plan. However, the junta did not cooperate in attempts to refine the details of the peace plan and by year's end had taken no steps to implement it.

Before May 25, the RSLMF was responsible for external and, together with the police, internal security, primarily against RUF attacks. The RSLMF was supported by Nigerian and Guinean military contingents and by personnel working under a training and logistics contract with Executive Outcomes, a private South African mercenary firm. In compliance with the November 1996 Abidjan Peace Agreement, President Kabbah terminated the contract with Executive Outcomes at the end of January. For 20 months, Executive Outcomes had played the critical role in government efforts to protect major towns and diamond mining areas from RUF attacks. Groups of traditional hunters (including the Mende Kamajohs, Temne Kapras, and Koranko Tamaboros) organized as civil defense militias, with government support defended their chiefdoms from RUF attacks and RSLMF looting. Neither the RSLMF nor the civil defense militia were fully under government control. After May 25, the RUF joined with RSLMF troops loyal to the AFRC junta and renamed itself the People's Army of Sierra Leone. RSLMF forces loyal to the AFRC appear to function separately from RUF troops. They also fought occasional battles against each other. In June the AFRC formed joint military and police antilooting squads and gave them authority to shoot looters on sight.

Before the coup on May 25, government security forces and the RUF committed numerous human rights abuses. After

May 25, the scale of violence and human rights abuses committed against civilians by the AFRC and RUF greatly increased. In addition members of the Civil Defense Force allegedly committed serious human rights abuses.

Sierra Leone is an extremely poor country. Before the civil war began in 1992, more than 70 percent of the 4.5 million citizens were involved in some aspect of agriculture, mainly subsistence farming. Although the country has substantial mineral resources, including diamonds, gold, rutile, and bauxite, official receipts from legal exports have been small in recent years. For decades the majority of diamond and gold production has been smuggled abroad. The economic infrastructure has nearly collapsed due to corruption, neglect, and war-related disruptions. The 6-year RUF insurgency dislocated more than 40 percent of the country's population, placing additional burdens on Sierra Leone's fragile economy. According to the United Nations, the average life expectancy is now only 34 years. One child out of four dies before the age of 5. The economic embargo imposed on the military junta by ECOWAS caused the customs duties to dry up, depriving the AFRC of 85 percent of its expected revenue flow.

Sierra Leone's human rights record worsened significantly and is now extremely poor. Before the May 25 coup, government military forces committed serious human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, beatings, arbitrary arrest and detention, and illegal searches. Under the elected Government as well as under the military regime, there were reports that police abused suspects during arrest and interrogation. Prison conditions remained life threatening. Prior to May 25, lengthy delays in trials, prolonged pretrial detentions, and violations of due process were problems. Government harassment of the press was also a problem. Discrimination against ethnic minorities persisted, and violence against women remained widespread, as was violence against children, including female genital mutilation (FGM) and the use of child soldiers.

Prior to the coup, RUF forces continued to attack villages and ambush travelers, killing, torturing, raping, and mutilating civilians. The RUF abducted children and forced them to commit atrocities, including the torture and murder of their relatives. The RUF raped and sexually abused young girls and women during attacks.

After May 25, AFRC and RUF forces committed numerous, serious human rights abuses including deliberate extrajudicial killings of unarmed civilians, torture, mutilation, rape, beatings, arbitrary arrest and detention, and illegal searches. The military junta routinely jailed antiregime civic leaders and students without judicial process; junta forces killed some detainees; amputated the arms of others; and raped women as punishment for their opposition to the regime. After the coup, the court system ceased to function. The AFRC announced that it would replace the judiciary with People's Revolutionary Courts manned by ordinary citizens. There is no evidence that these or any other courts are functioning. The military junta harassed, beat, detained, and arrested journalists.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

Before and after the coup, government military forces and the RUF committed political and extrajudicial killings. Soldiers and RUF troops engaged in looting, robbery, and extortion frequently killed civilians. The situation became much worse on May 25 when coup leaders freed hundreds of prisoners from Pademba Road prison and gave them military uniforms and weapons. Freed prisoners, AFRC troops, and RUF forces engaged in looting, rape, and murder. Foreign countries evacuated several thousand foreign citizens and tens of thousands of Sierra Leoneans fled Freetown. Up to 100 civilians were killed in the violence surrounding the coup. Hundreds more have been murdered subsequently in both random violence and political killings. In mid-June, AFRC officials created antilooting squads including the Western Area Security Patrol and gave them authority to shoot looters on sight. Antilooting Decree Number Six published on November 28, but effective retroactively to May 28, made looting punishable by firing squad. AFRC and RUF officials summarily executed at least 120 soldiers and civilians accused of looting and other crimes. Eight senior members of the AFRC who looted the Iranian Embassy on New Year's Eve were demoted or lightly fined.

Throughout the last half of the year, there was fierce fighting between AFRC/RUF forces and Kamajohs in several areas in the Southern and Eastern Provinces. AFRC/RUF forces routinely summarily executed captured Kamajohs. AFRC/RUF forces routinely shot and tortured civilians and looted their property while searching for Kamajohs. While the Kamajohs usually turned AFRC/RUF prisoners over to ECOMOG, a few AFRC/RUF prisoners were executed while in Kamajoh custody.

At least one person was killed and another injured in Bo on May 27 when AFRC soldiers shot at a crowd of about 5,000 persons demonstrating against the coup. The demonstration started when large quantities of looted goods were discovered in the army's possession.

At least 80 people, including 30 civilians, were killed during fighting in Kenema between RSLMF troops and Kamajohs during the first weekend in May. Fighting started when soldiers shot at a truck of Kamajohs, killing three, as they drove past the army base at Kpetema. At least 22 people, including at least 6 civilians, were killed in fighting that started that weekend between RSLMF troops and Kapras at Camp Charlie near Matotoka.

On May 29, at Masingbi in the Eastern Province, AFRC soldiers ambushed a group of Kamajohs, killing 20 of them. RUF forces firing automatic rifles, grenade launchers, and mortars repeatedly attacked the town of Moyamba at the end of June. During 1 attack they killed more than 10 people, including women and children.

In June the Western Area Security Patrol and antilooting squads in other parts of the country executed at least two dozen people including four soldiers who tried to rape four nuns and loot their residence on June 11. Their bodies were dumped into the sea. In other cases, armed robbers were hacked to pieces or decapitated. A teenage boy caught breaking into a house in Freetown on June 25 was hacked to death; his arms and head were chopped off and one testicle placed in his mouth by the antilooting squad.

On June 26, AFRC/RUF troops searching for Kamajohs killed at least 25 people in Bo District. Soldiers took Albert Sandy Demby, paramount chief of Baoma Chiefdom and father of Vice President Albert J.E. Demby, from his home in Gerihun, Bo District, and shot him in the stomach, killing him. The soldiers then attacked and burned the villages of Sembahun and Telu Bongor, the home of Deputy Defense Minister Samuel Hinga Norman.

During an attack on the town of Moyamba at the end of June, RUF troops tortured student leader Sheku Kabbah in public before killing him; they gouged out his eyes and cut off his ears before cutting his throat.

On July 8, a young woman was summarily executed by uniformed soldiers in Freetown for publicly supporting President Kabbah. Junta military officers executed three soldiers in July in Kenema for looting.

On August 12, AFRC troops executed a soldier in Freetown after he shot and killed a mechanic who asked the soldier to pay for five gallons of gasoline that the soldier had taken from the gas station. An angry crowd chased the soldier to a police station. Other soldiers rushed in and dragged him out, stripped off his uniform, and shot him at least five times.

On August 18, at least 11 people were killed when AFRC forces attacked students attempting a "march for democracy" in protest against the AFRC. One student from Njala University was chopped into pieces by the military forces. Many students remain missing and the number killed may be higher. Many students also were arrested arbitrarily and tortured(see Section 1.c.).

In August AFRC soldiers beat and cut the throat of paramount chief Dessima from the Dame chiefdom near Kenema. His deputy was abducted and presumed killed. In late August, seven men were arrested and taken to Cockerill Military Headquarters after arriving at a Freetown wharf from Lungi across the river. Six were shot after being accused of involvement with FM 98.1 radio station; one later was released.

On September 1, members of the Kamajoh and Kapra militias beheaded four people who they suspected of being soldiers or AFRC sympathizers. The four were traveling from Bo to Makeni in a commercial vehicle that stopped at a CDF checkpoint at Gumahun, 25 miles from Bo. After the vehicle was searched, the driver was identified as a retired soldier and arrested. Two other men in military T-shirts also were arrested, along with the girlfriend of one of the men. All four were summarily executed. The other passengers in the vehicle were allowed to continue their journey to Makeni.

Ten soldiers were executed by firing squad on October 25. Military police head Captain John Harleston said that all

10 had pleaded guilty to murder charges during a 1-day trial. Other sources said that two of those executed had been accused of beating the girlfriend of a military officer. Harleston said that the executions were meant to send a signal to undisciplined soldiers and to reassure the civilian population.

Nine passengers on a bus traveling between Kenema and Bo were killed on November 2 in a clash between AFRC soldiers and members of the Kamajoh militia. Sierra Leone Road Transport Company officials said the fighting began when soldiers on the bus ignored an order to disembark at a Kamajoh roadblock.

On December 3, eight armed robbers were executed by firing squad in a soccer field in Koidu town in the eastern Kono District. A junta spokesman said that the eight had appeared before a 1-day military tribunal. One of the eight persons executed, Jonathan Moore, had been serving a 25-year sentence when he was released from prison during the coup.

b. Disappearance

Thousands of civilians disappeared following the May 25 junta takeover. In many cases, it is unclear whether the individuals were killed, captured by AFRC/RUF forces, or whether they successfully fled the country. Some individuals subsequently reappeared in refugee camps or in other parts of the country. The whereabouts of hundreds of people detained by junta officials since the coup remain unknown. In most cases, family members are too frightened of the junta to inquire about the location of their missing relatives.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Although the now suspended Constitution prohibits torture, there were numerous reports that government security forces at times used torture. For example in January, a soldier on trial for treason for the September 1996 plot to overthrow the government alleged that he had been forced to sign a confession under torture. Joseph Yajah, a former security officer at State House, testified in court that he was tortured at CID headquarters where deputy head Samuel Soumassa urged him to change his statement. Yajah said he was tied to a chair in the squad office, stripped naked, had ice water poured on him, and was subjected to electric shocks. He said police officers stuffed a cap in his mouth when he screamed. Yajah also testified that a subinspector put out a cigarette on his head and ordered other men to scratch his back with wire. The police denied the allegations.

In the week of the military takeover, the level of violence by military and RUF forces caused the exodus of hundreds of thousands of civilians from Freetown, the capital, and other population centers. Soldiers and released prisoners engaged in wholesale looting of private homes, businesses, diplomatic residences, international organizations, and warehouses of humanitarian assistance organizations. In particular local and foreign officials and businessman were targeted for looting and beatings. Their female family members were targeted for rape. Similar acts of abuse and violence continued through the end of the year.

Both AFRC and RUF forces used torture on numerous occasions. Since 1991 the RUF waged an armed rebellion marked by violent attacks against civilians. After the RUF joined the AFRC junta in Freetown, RUF Spokesman Eldred Collins admitted responsibility for the atrocities committed in the country's interior. He asserted that the RUF "burned, looted, maimed, and killed," not because it wanted to, but because "that was the only way we could have uprooted a rotten system."

A leader of the AFRC beat student leader Ansu Bockarie and cut him with a razor blade in early June.

On August 18, AFRC and RUF soldiers killed at least

11 students during a student "march for democracy" against the junta in Freetown. A large number of students and other protesters suffered severe injuries when AFRC and RUF forces breaking up the march attacked them with machetes and bayonets. Four had their arms chopped off. Approximately 20 female students were arrested and taken directly to the residences of AFRC/RUF leaders who sexually assaulted them. Some are still detained. One female student remains missing.

President of the Civil Liberties Congress Soulayman Banja Tejan-Sie was arrested on August 18 and beaten with military helmets and gun butts. His arms were tied with rope, and he was put in the truck of a car belonging to an AFRC leader. After several hours in the car, he was taken to Cockerill Military Headquarters where he was interrogated and beaten. He was later transferred to Pademba Road prison's death row and was denied washing and sanitary facilities. He was denied food for the first 3 days that he was detained. The AFRC released Tejan-Sie on August 28, but kept him under close surveillance until he fled the country in early October.

In the Eastern Province near Tongo, AFRC officials harassed, intimidated, and tortured miners to find the location of diamonds. In August a miner was roped over a fire in the Kono area by a junta official to make him disclose where he had hidden a recently found diamond. The miner surrendered the diamond and his tribe had to pay AFRC officials a large ransom sum for his release.

RUF soldiers tortured and killed numerous persons (see Section 1.a.). On October 2, three soldiers and one member of the RUF attacked Olu Jones at his house. He was tied, beaten, and stabbed in both ears with a bayonet. In the early morning, the soldiers took him to Cockerill Military Headquarters.

Refugees fleeing Sierra Leone reported torture and abuse of civilians by AFRC soldiers and the RUF, particularly in the Mende areas in the south and east where the AFRC and RUF were fighting the Kamajohs. AFRC/RUF soldiers burned villages suspected of supporting the Kamajohs. Civilians were beaten and tortured. Women and girls were raped, sexually tortured, and forced into sexual slavery.

Both the AFRC and the RUF use rape as an instrument of control and punishment. The military junta has not taken steps to control violence by soldiers against women and often encourages it.

Prison conditions remain life threatening. The quality of food and medical care was poor. In mid-May, Pademba Road prison held 60 percent more inmates than its capacity. The majority of those were on remand awaiting trial. When the AFRC seized power on May 25, it broke open the Pademba Road prison and freed all inmates. By the end of the year, Pademba Road prison was again seriously overcrowded with persons detained by the AFRC. Many detainees are held in metal shipping containers at Cockerill military headquarters.

The AFRC junta occasionally granted the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Prison Watch limited access to prisoners, many of whom were officials in the previous government, journalists, or student protesters. In August Prison Watch reported that most detainees in Pademba Road prison brutalized and beaten during arrest and interrogation, and none had been formally charged or had access to legal counsel.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The AFRC junta suspended the Constitution and gave itself far-reaching powers of detention. Any person can be arrested "in the interest of public safety." There are no safeguards against arbitrary arrest

or indefinite detention without charge or trial. Members of the elected Government and people associated with it, members of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), journalists, students, and human rights activists have been arbitrarily arrested and detained without charge in what the junta calls "military safe custody." Police and military officials arrest without warrant and detain indefinitely any person they suspected of posing a threat to military rule. With the collapse of the rule of law, all civilians are at risk of arbitrary arrest and detention.

Several hundred detainees are being held at Pademba Road prison, Cockerill military headquarters, Criminal Investigation Department (CID) headquarters, and police stations or military installations throughout the country. While some detainees have been released after a short time, others have been held for weeks or months. Many have been beaten or tortured (see Section 1.c.). Most detainees who are released go into hiding or flee from the country.

In the days immediately following the coup, several members of President Kabbah's cabinet and other senior government and military officers were detained at Cockerill military headquarters. Soldiers conducted house-to-house searches for others. Most of these detainees were released after a few days. On June 16, at least eight senior military officers and seven civilians associated with the SLPP were arrested and accused of conspiring to overthrow the AFRC. None was charged with a crime; however, they were not allowed visitors. Most were released within several weeks.

Hundreds of people have been detained and beaten by junta troops searching for the transmitter of a clandestine, prodemocracy radio station that began broadcasting in July.

More than 120 people were arrested on August 18 and 19 as the National Union of Sierra Leone Students (NUSS) attempted to hold a "march for democracy" in protest against the AFRC. Eighty-six students were taken to Pademba Road prison where they were held for 12 days before release. Another 35 students were taken to Cockerill military headquarters. Others were taken to CID headquarters and about 20 women were taken directly to the residences of junta leaders. In October the junta admitted that it was still holding 37 students; many more, including some women, remained missing.

On September 16, People's Army troops attacked the town of Bonthe, on Sherbro Island, searching for a Kamajoh training center. The soldiers arrested 60 civilians suspected of sympathizing with the Kamajohs and took them to Moyamba for questioning. It is not clear what happened to them afterwards.

On October 13, the junta arrested eight people, including the elected Government's Deputy Minister of Marine Resources Mamoud Sesay, newspaper editor Prince Akpu, and Temne tribal chief Alhaji King Naimbana for "involvement in subversive activities." At the time the junta admitted to holding another 33 detainees it described as "prodemocracy activists."

On November 26, the AFRC arrested Chief A.B. Tomboyeke in Baoma Chiefdom, Bo District while searching for Kamajohs.

Prior to the coup, on March 29 RUF forces abducted several of its own members at Nongowa in Kailahun District in the Eastern Province. Two of those abducted, Fayia Musa and Ibrahim Deen-Jalloh, had been appointed as RUF representatives to the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace established by the Abidjan Peace Accord, which was signed by the Government and the RUF in November 1996. In April they were reported to be on trial in an RUF people's court for plotting to overthrow RUF leader Foday Sankoh. The captives' condition was uncertain at year's end.

The junta refused to allow several prominent businessmen, government officials, and journalists to leave

the country. Because of the violence surrounding the coup and the RUF's reputation for brutality, hundreds of thousands of Sierra Leoneans fled the country fearing for their lives. Many more left later after being targeted by the junta. President Kabbah and members of his government are among those now in exile in Guinea.

The junta does not practice forced exile; however, thousands have fled for their own safety.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The suspended Constitution included provisions for an independent judiciary. Virtually all magistrates have fled the country; several were beaten, and some were raped by prisoners released from prison during the coup. The court system has not functioned since May 25. The AFRC announced that it would replace the judiciary with People's Revolutionary Courts manned by ordinary citizens, but there is no evidence that these or any other courts are functioning.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The AFRC monitored actions by citizens to prevent them from acting in a manner it deemed prejudicial to its continuation in power and to control association or communication with other persons. The junta erected roadblocks to control movement and conducted surveillance of the homes of people it perceives as opponents. Telephones and mail are monitored by the military junta. There were numerous occasions of abusive treatment of citizens by soldiers and police throughout the country, including forced entry into homes, robberies, and assaults. Many of these abuses were sanctioned by or committed by high-ranking members of the junta. Joint military and police Antilooting Squads frequently executed soldiers caught looting homes.

g. Use of Excessive Force and Violations of Humanitarian Law in Internal Conflicts

The RUF fighting against three successive governments resulted in an estimated 20,000 deaths since 1991. More than one-third of Sierra Leone's 4.5 million citizens are displaced internally or are living as refugees in neighboring countries because of insecurity and violence stemming from the civil war and the AFRC/RUF takeover. After taking power, junta forces seized food aid destined for displaced persons and refugees, and looted the headquarters and warehouses of international aid organizations, making humanitarian relief difficult. The AFRC also planted land mines around ECOMOG installations and at other strategic sites in an attempt to hinder their efforts to restore the constitutional government.

There were many serious violations of humanitarian law throughout the country before as well as after the military takeover. Military and RUF forces committed summary executions of prisoners and killings, torture, rape, and mutilation of civilians. Traditional hunter societies (including the Mende Kamajohs, Temne Kapras, and Koranko Tamaboros) organized as civil defense militias and sought to protect their chiefdoms from both RUF attacks and military looters. At times they executed military or RUF forces that they had captured. Hundreds of civilians were killed in fighting between military and RUF troops and the civil defense forces.

Despite the Abidjan Peace Agreement signed in November 1996, and a cease-fire in effect, RUF rebels and elements of the government security forces continued to attack villages and ambush vehicles. RUF forces continued to abduct villagers and force them into involuntary servitude, making them serve as porters, sexual slaves, human shields, and fighters, among other abuses. Civilians were murdered, maimed, tortured, and raped in these attacks. In some cases, perpetrators could not be identified; however, it is generally believed that RUF forces, military personnel, and ordinary thieves, committed

attacks on civilians. Even in the instances where perpetrators could be identified, the Government took no action against them.

In early May, the RUF resumed targeting international organizations. On May 7 several miles from Makeni, RUF gunmen attacked two United Nations vehicles with machine gun fire. The driver of one vehicle was killed and another U.N. employee was injured. The next day two more humanitarian aid workers were injured when the RUF attacked two World Food Program vehicles on the Makeni-Lunsar road.

Beginning on May 9, forces generally believed to belong to the RUF began a campaign of attacks against villages in the Northern province. Armed groups in both military uniforms and civilian clothes attacked at least 10 villages with sticks, machetes, guns, and rocket propelled grenades. The attacks caused 8,000 people to seek refuge in the Northern province capital of Makeni and thousands more to flee to Guinea. In the attack on Kalangba village, more than a dozen people were killed and 87 houses burned. In Gbandembu village, the clinic and 124 of 130 houses were burned. Scores of people whose hands and feet had been cut off by rebel forces sought medical attention in Makeni. Many people were also abducted in these attacks. On May 14, these forces, including many young boys, captured the northern town of Kamakwie, leaving dozens of corpses lying in the streets. They destroyed the hospital, dispensary, and pharmacy, and burned more than 60 houses. In separate attacks in mid-May, the RUF killed more than 100 people in the eastern towns of Kalihun and Bomaru.

On the morning of June 2, after the junta broke off negotiations with the international community, a Nigerian warship shelled AFRC/RUF military installations in the western end of Freetown for several hours. In response 150 RUF soldiers attacked and then set fire to the Mammy Yoko Hotel where some 600 foreigners were awaiting evacuation and where ECOMOG forces and Nigerian negotiators had set up their headquarters. At least one person at the hotel died in the attack and six were injured, including five Nigerian soldiers guarding the hotel. Later that day RUF troops also attacked the Bintumani hotel. At least 62 civilians were killed and more injured by the RUF-fired rocket-propelled grenades and Nigerian shells that fell into residential areas.

In late June, virtually the entire population of Magburka fled 60 miles to Makeni after RUF troops entered the town and began harassing civilians.

On September 16, AFRC and RUF troops searching for a Kamajoh training center attacked the town of Bonthe on Sherbro Island, looting and destroying much of the town. At least 34 Kamajohs were killed. Sixty civilians were arrested and taken away for questioning.

In fighting during October, AFRC and RUF supporters looted and burned homes of President Kabbah's family and supporters of the elected Government, including the homes of Chairman of the Commission for Consolidation of the Peace Desmond Luke, Minister of Works Emmanuel O. Grant, and Deputy Minister in the Vice President's Office Theresa Koroma. At least seven villages in Baoma chiefdom, Bo District were abandoned in late October after AFRC/RUF troops burned the houses and stole the rice crop.

On November 26, AFRC soldiers burned 13 houses in the villages of Pelewahun Ngiyeibu and Gerihun in Bo district while searching for Kamajohs.

On December 3, Kamajohs seized a Sierra Leone Red Cross truck delivering relief food to Moyamba. They reportedly manhandled the Red Cross staff and told them that in the future, they should receive all relief supplies for distribution.

On December 9 and 10, AFRC and RUF forces launched attacks on Kamajoh strongholds in of Joru and Gorahun villages in Kenema District and Sonoshun, Fairo and Dia villages in Pujehun District. The villages were attacked by an AFRC helicopter gunship, artillery, and rocket propelled grenades. AFRC and RUF troops looted the villages, set fire to houses and rice farms, and raped several women. Similar AFRC/RUF attacks on Kamajoh strongholds throughout the eastern and southeastern parts of the country continued through the end of the year with significant fighting along the border with Liberia.

ECOMOG artillery and rocket attacks killed numerous civilians. In June a Nigerian warship shelled AFRC/RUF installations in Freetown for several hours. At least 150 civilians were killed and more were wounded during fighting that started on July 12 between AFRC/RUF and ECOMOG forces at the ECOMOG bases at Lungi Airport, Hastings Airfield, Jui, and Kossoh near Freetown. Junta forces attacked the ECOMOG bases and nearby towns seeking a new clandestine radio station that had recently broadcast a speech by President Kabbah.

About 15 civilians were killed in fighting that began when AFRC and RUF forces attacked the ECOMOG base at Lungi Airport on August 13. Most of the civilians were killed when ECOMOG troops tried to shell the attacking AFRC/RUF troops. A senior AFRC official said the junta would continue to harass ECOMOG troops until they left the airport.

Twenty-one civilians were killed and many more wounded during heavy fighting that broke out on September 4 when ECOMOG troops at Lungi Airport launched artillery and air attacks against two container ships docking at Queen Elizabeth Quay in violation of the ECOWAS embargo. There were reports that some of the ECOMOG shells fell in residential areas. Most of the civilian casualties were at Marbela Market. It is not clear whether the market was hit by an ECOMOG shell or by anti-aircraft rounds fired from AFRC positions at Fourah Bay College on Mount Aureol.

On September 5, ECOMOG Force Commander Major General Victor Malu issued a "final warning" that ECOMOG would attack any ships violating the ECOWAS embargo. The next day a Nigerian Alpha jet dropped bombs into the water near a Ukrainian cargo ship Seaway as it unloaded in violation of the embargo. Three paramilitary policemen and a port official were seriously injured. The following day, another Nigerian aircraft dropped two bombs on the ship. No injuries were reported in the second attack. General Malu claimed that, in addition to rice, the ship had been discharging arms and ammunition for the junta. In the following days, AFRC officials reportedly smuggled much of the rice into Guinea and sold it for their personal gain.

Hundreds of people died in 2 weeks of heavy fighting that started on October 8 between AFRC/RUF troops and ECOMOG forces. Hostilities began when an AFRC helicopter gunship fired at an ECOMOG helicopter ferrying supplies between ECOMOG bases. In retaliation a Nigerian Alpha jet fired rockets at, and dropped bombs on, the AFRC helicopter after it had returned to its base at Cockerill Military Headquarters. The AFRC reported that four soldiers and two civilians were killed in the attack on Cockerill. AFRC and RUF troops then attacked ECOMOG positions at Lungi Airport, Kossoh Town, and Jui. Dozens of civilians were killed by artillery fired by both sides. The fighting spread as AFRC/RUF troops attacked Nigerian ECOMOG contingents at Bo and Kenema. AFRC military trucks patrolled Freetown, arresting soldiers who had gone AWOL and refused to fight against ECOMOG troops, and forcibly impressed others into service. On October 16, at least 14 civilians were killed in the eastern outskirts of Freetown by ECOMOG artillery fired from Lungi Airport at AFRC/RUF troops attacking ECOMOG forces at Jui and Kossoh Town. Eight civilians were killed and 20 injured the same day when a bomb dropped by a Nigerian Alpha jet exploded in a market at Kissy. The Alpha jets also targeted junta radio and television transmitters. The AFRC placed anti-aircraft guns in residential areas. Shells fired by these guns frequently fell in residential areas.

On December 11, AFRC forces at Daru barracks in Kailahun District fired on a Nigerian Alpha jet. The jet dropped two bombs that killed several people in the nearby village of Benduma.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The suspended Constitution provided for freedom of speech and of the press. In practice, however, prior to May 25 the Kabbah Government detained some journalists without charge and charged some with sedition, libel, and contempt of Parliament for their coverage of alleged government corruption, the civil war, and human rights issues. The elected Kabbah Government's frequent use of criminal libel and sedition charges encouraged self-censorship. Imposition of heavy fines financially crippled some members of the private press. Forty-six newspapers circulated while the elected Government was in power. On May 14, Parliament passed the Media Practitioner Act, designed to drastically curtail the numbers of journalists and newspapers. The law required all journalists to have an academic degree in journalism and to register with the authorities every year; editors are required to have 10 years professional experience. About 80 percent of the country's journalists could not meet these criteria; if enforced, the law would prevent them from working as journalists.

Shortly after the coup, the AFRC harshly criticized the Media Practitioner Act and asserted that press freedom would be unrestricted. However, journalists, like other critics of the junta, quickly became targets for harassment and intimidation. Dozens of journalists fled the country in fear of the military junta. In September following publication of a story in the Standard Times that revealed discord among members of the AFRC Supreme Council, the junta announced that newspapers were required to obtain permission before publishing. At year's end, only about six newspapers remained, all operating at the discretion of the AFRC Minister of Information. Under the elected Government five radio stations operated in Freetown and one in the provincial city of Bo. After May 25, the only regularly operating broadcast media were government radio and television stations tightly controlled by the military junta and the clandestine station FM 98.1 operated by the elected Government in exile. The AFRC/RUF junta took severe measures attempting to close FM 98.1, including torturing people who might know its location and electronically jamming its broadcasts. Many of the journalists who remained in Sierra Leone after May 25 were harassed, detained, arrested, and beaten by the military junta for reporting perceived to be critical of the AFRC or the RUF.

Under the elected Government, Punch newspaper correspondent Pat Kawa was arrested on January 24 on defamation charges after reporting allegations of financial improprieties by government officials. The case was dismissed in court on March 3. Footprints magazine publisher Harry Evans was arrested on March 6 and held without charge for a week after publishing an article alleging that the Minister of Presidential Affairs had imported 50 automobiles without paying customs taxes. Footprints editor Mohammed Karim and staff writer Njai Kanthba also were arrested and held for

3 days on spurious charges of drug possession. Three journalists from Expo Times newspaper were arrested without charge on March 19 following publication of an article entitled "Abacha's Wild West Gangsterism," about the detention of RUF leader Foday Sankoh by the Nigerian government. They later were charged with spying and possession of a secret military document and were released on bail after 2 weeks.

On May 27, AFRC military personnel looted the Concord Times newspaper offices. Fearing for their safety, the newspaper's staff went into hiding. On June 4, two armed men searching for a Kabbah Government minister broke into the home of Standard Times newspaper managing editor Phillip

Neville. When he denied sheltering the official, Neville was beaten. On June 9, Sky FM talk show host Ojukutu Macaulay went into hiding after a group of AFRC soldiers threatened to kill him for speaking against the military takeover. Following a June 11 story in For Di People newspaper about travel to Libya by an AFRC delegation, the junta warned journalists to seek clarification from AFRC headquarters before publishing sensitive security information. For Di People subsequently closed after receiving verbal threats from AFRC officials. In mid-June British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) stringer Sylvester Rogers went into hiding after learning that AFRC soldiers were trying to locate him. On October 2, AFRC Spokesman Allieu Kamara admitted that security personnel had taken Rogers into "safe restriction" after Rogers had attempted to leave the country without a police permit.

On July 8, The Point newspaper managing editor Budu Hayes was arrested at his home and detained at AFRC military headquarters until the following day. The soldiers who arrested Hayes alleged that he was harboring people fighting against the revolution. Also on July 8, The Democrat newspaper reporter Saloman Conteh and freelance correspondent Jeff Bowlay Williams were arrested at Democrat offices by 20 soldiers and interrogated at AFRC military headquarters. They then were transferred to Pademba Road prison and held 11 days without charge. The Democrat stopped publication when they were arrested. Business Vision reporter Martins I. Martins was arrested on July 19 and detained at AFRC military headquarters for 2 days on suspicion that he had communicated with President Kabbah. When he returned to his home, he discovered that it had been looted. On July 26, AFRC soldiers arrested Unity Now editors Dominick Lamine and Sahr Mbayoh and confiscated the newspaper's computers. AFRC officials claimed that the newspaper had subversive materials. The two editors were had incommunicado and released several days later. AFRC soldiers continued to search for the newspaper's editor-in-chief Frank Kposowa, who went into hiding to avoid arrest. On July 26, Kenema-based BBC stringer Suliman Momodu also went into hiding after learning that he was being sought by AFRC soldiers. On July 28, AFRC soldiers arrested New Tablet production manager Suliman Janger and seized

900 copies of the newspaper. Soldiers also arrested five newspaper vendors. New Tablet editor Gibril Foday Musa went into hiding to avoid arrest. On July 30, AFRC soldiers seized 1,500 copies of the Standard Times at the newspapers offices. The soldiers were searching for managing editor Philip Neville who had gone into hiding after receiving threatening phone calls for articles critical of the AFRC.

On August 18, AFRC soldiers arrested Voice of America correspondent Kelvin Lewis, Sky FM talk show host Ojukutu Macaulay, and their driver as they were on their way to cover a student demonstration against the junta. Soldiers beat them with machetes and gun butts and threatened to kill them. They were detained overnight in a metal shipping container at AFRC Cockerill military headquarters but released the next day.

On September 1, BBC stringer Prince Brimah was ordered detained by AFRC Secretary of State for the Southern province, Major Augustine Kamara, who reportedly was displeased by his report about the execution of four persons at a CDF roadblock on the road between Bo and Makeni (see Section 1.g.). Kamara ordered Brimah taken to a police station where he was detained for 4 hours in a cell full of feces and then released. On the morning of September 20, several people who had gathered at the Mende Central Mosque in Freetown were beaten by security forces seeking information about the FM 98.1 radio station.

In early October, Concord Times acting editor Foday Fofana and the acting secretary of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) Fallah Ensa-Ndemah went into hiding after receiving information that they were to be arrested on subversion charges stemming from the SLAJ's denunciation of the AFRC junta and its control of the press. Freelance journalist Donald Davis was arrested on October 8 and detained in Pademba Road prison. Freelance journalist Abdul Salam Timbo was arrested on subversion

charges on October 10 and is being held incommunicado. On October 10, a truckload of soldiers arrested Punch newspaper Editor David Tambaryoh at his residence. He was held for 3 days on subversion charges stemming from his alleged contact with legitimate Sierra Leone government officials. Armed men searching for Tambaryoh's personal property looted his sister-in-law's home and twice raped her and her daughter. After his release, Tambaryoh went into hiding. Umaru Fofana, a freelance correspondent for The Vision newspaper and the BBC was shot in the leg and physically abused on October 11 by junta forces who claimed that he was reporting for FM 98.1. He was released later that day. Democrat newspaper acting editor John Foray and freelance journalist Abdul Kpowsa were beaten by junta forces and detained without charge on October 11. AFRC soldiers arrested For Di People editor Paul Kamara on October 16 and took him to Pademba Road prison. The soldiers smashed and looted the office, and confiscated the newspaper's computers and Kamara's car. The soldiers gave no reason for Kamara's arrest.

On November 13, the AFRC temporarily suspended the Standard Times and detained several of its reporters after it printed a story suggesting that the AFRC/RUF junta was involved in a plot with Liberian President Charles Taylor to overthrow the Government of Guinea. The suspension was lifted a week later after the newspaper retracted the story. On November 21, the AFRC temporarily suspended The Democrat after it reported a burglary at the British High Commissioner's offices and home by seven uniformed men. It also subsequently retracted this story.

On November 22, police arrested Standard Times editor Ibrahim Karim Sei, The Democrat editor Pious Foray, and Concord Times acting editor Dorothy Awonoor-Gordon, and four other journalists. A police spokesman said that all three newspapers had carried "dubious articles" that threatened to undermine the security of the State. The seven journalists were detained for a week without charges. The Concord Times also had published an article disclosing the delivery of lubricating oil to the Freetown power plant, in violation of U.N. Security Council sanctions.

On December 16, journalist Vandi Kallon was detained and brutally beaten by AFRC officials who accused him of passing information to radio station FM 98.1 and ECOMOG. There was no information on his circumstances at year's end.

The elected Government respected academic freedom. All schools and universities were closed after May 25 as both teachers and students stayed away in protest against the AFRC's seizure of power.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The suspended Constitution provided for freedom of assembly; however, at times the elected Government limited this right. The elected Government permitted many street demonstrations.

In February, however, police and armed forces personnel killed two persons and injured 20 others in breaking up a riot by several hundred youths against the postal service. The police fired tear gas and started shooting after rioters hurled stones at them. One of the dead men was shot in the chest as he emerged from an Ash Wednesday mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral near the post office where the riot was taking place. President Kabbah criticized the police for using excessive force in dispersing the rioters.

On March 11, police fired tear gas to disperse hundreds of students at the Parade Grounds soccer field in Freetown. The National Union of Sierra Leone Students (NUSS) had called the meeting to plan protests against the Government's decision to give retirement benefits to former President Major-General Joseph Momoh. The police refused to issue a permit for the meeting, claiming that security could not be ensured, and suggesting that the students meet instead on college campuses.

On March 14, police attacked 2,000 students attempting to meet in an open park. Before NUSS Secretary-General Abdulai Bayratty was to address the crowd, 50 riot policemen disrupted the meeting to arrest him and other student leaders. When students attempted to prevent the leaders' arrests, the police attempted to disperse the crowd with tear gas and batons, injuring at least 15 persons. Several more students were detained by the police. A government statement said that police had been ordered "to take appropriate but reasonable action to prevent a student group meeting anywhere throughout Sierra Leone." It said that the students could hold meetings on any of the college campuses, but not elsewhere.

After May 25, the military junta restricted freedom of assembly and banned public demonstrations and meetings.

At least one person was killed and another injured in Bo on May 27 when AFRC soldiers shot at a crowd of about 5,000 people demonstrating against the coup. The demonstration started when large quantities of looted goods were discovered in the army's possession. Nearly all the shops in Bo and an Action Contre La Faim warehouse were looted

2 days earlier when the junta released all the inmates at the Bo prison.

The military junta violently broke up a student march in Freetown on August 18. Using assault weapons and machetes, AFRC/RUF soldiers killed at least 11 students and maimed many others with machetes and bayonets. Soldiers shooting rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons set up roadblocks and searched the streets, making arrests wherever a group had gathered. AFRC/RUF forces chased students into Connaught hospital and assaulted patients as they searched for students. Students and citizens harboring students were severely beaten when found and detained in the Pademba Road prison.

Also on August 18, combined operation by AFRC and RUF troops and State Security Division police armed with automatic weapons, rocket-propelled grenades, and anti-aircraft guns broke up a student demonstration in the Southern province capital of Bo. After marching for a short distance, the students were confronted by the security forces, who dispersed them with tear gas.

The suspended Constitution provided for the right to form political, economic, social, and professional organizations, and the elected Government respected this provision in practice.

The AFRC junta restricted freedom of association and outlawed political parties and activities.

c. Freedom of Religion

The suspended Constitution provided for freedom of religion. The Kabbah Government respected this right in practice. Most religious institutions have continued to operate under the junta. However, due to security concerns, most foreign missionaries left the country. On August 17, AFRC security forces detained Secretary General of the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL) Alimamy Kokomah at his church and ordered him to cancel an interreligious worship service scheduled for Freetown's national stadium. Security officers turned back people who attempted to reach the stadium that evening. The AFRC also denied a CCSL request that it be allowed to host some form of worship service at its headquarters, alleging the possibility of infiltration.

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The military junta tightly controls travel within the country. Most politicians, government officials, and

businessmen left the country immediately after the coup. Many prominent persons were given safe haven through international evacuation efforts following the coup. Numerous checkpoints manned by AFRC/RUF soldiers make travel difficult. The junta refused to allow several prominent businessman, government officials, and journalists to leave the country. The junta severely restricts internal travel and emigration.

Approximately 1.4 million of Sierra Leone's 4.5 million citizens are displaced within the country. An estimated 238,000 Sierra Leoneans are refugees in Guinea and Liberia, including as many as 40,000 who fled to Guinea and 25,000 to Liberia following the coup. Several thousand more have sought refuge in The Gambia, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, and Mali. Many middle class Sierra Leoneans fled to Europe, Great Britain, and the United States.

Prior to the coup, the Government cooperated with the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. Several hundred thousand refugees and displaced persons returned to their homes in the months following the November 1996 signing of the Abidjan Accord. Many of these returnees were forced to flee their homes again after the May 25 coup. Sierra Leone had provided asylum to 17,000 Liberians; several thousand of these refugees fled following the coup, but 5,500 Liberian refugees remained in the Freetown area, awaiting safe passage to Liberia. After the evacuation of United Nations personnel in early June, they were assisted by the ICRC.

There is no formal process for granting political asylum.

Prior to the coup, there were no reports of forced return of persons to a country in which they feared persecution.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

Citizens do not have the right to change their government. On May 25, a military junta seized power from the civilian government which was chosen in free and fair elections. The AFRC suspended the Constitution, banned political parties, and announced that all legislation would be made by military decree. The military junta routinely threatened, harassed, imprisoned, tortured, and killed citizens who sought to challenge the military's seizure of power. The junta has not negotiated in good faith with the Committee of Five

(C-5) foreign ministers appointed by ECOWAS to bring about the return of the Kabbah Government and the restoration of constitutional order. Parliament has not functioned since the military takeover. Many civil servants refuse to report to work until constitutional order is restored.

There is 1 woman in the 34 member AFRC Supreme Council and 1 woman in the 20 member Cabinet.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Under the elected Government, several local human rights organizations operated including a local chapter of Amnesty International, the Civil Liberties Congress, Prison Watch, the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights, and the Society for Advancement of Civil Rights. Most members of these groups fled to Conakry, Guinea, from where they report on violations of human rights in Sierra Leone. Those who have stayed in Sierra Leone have to restrict their activities severely for their own safety.

On August 17, soldiers seeking Civil Liberties Congress President Soulaïman Banja Tejan-Sie arrested and beat three people closely associated with him. He was arrested the next day and taken to Cockerill military headquarters where he was tortured. He was then forced at gunpoint to appear on national television and to call upon students to cancel the "march for democracy" planned for that day. He was detained without charge at Pademba Road prison for 11 days and then placed under close surveillance until he fled the country in October.

The junta allowed ICRC and Prison Watch to visit the Pademba Road prison at least through October.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The suspended Constitution prohibited discrimination against women and provided for protection on the basis of race and ethnicity, except for the prohibition against citizenship for persons with a non-African father. This provision effectively blocks citizenship and political participation of those of Lebanese descent, and other persons with non-African fathers.

Women

Violence against women, especially wife beating, is common. Police are unlikely to intervene in domestic disputes except in cases of severe injury or death. Sierra Leone does not recognize domestic violence against women as a societal problem, and neither the elected Government nor the AFRC junta gave it high-level attention. Rape is a recognized societal problem and is punishable by up to 14 years' imprisonment. The elected Government enforced this law; however, the AFRC and the RUF use rape for both control and punishment.

The suspended Constitution provided for equal rights for women, but in practice women face both legal and societal discrimination. Their rights and status under traditional law vary significantly, depending upon the ethnic group to which they belong. The Temne and Limba tribes of the north afford greater rights to women to inherit property than does the Mende tribe, which gives preference to male heirs and unmarried daughters. However, in the Temne tribe, women cannot become paramount chiefs. In the south, the Mende tribe has a number of female paramount chiefs.

Women do not have equal access to education, economic opportunities, health facilities, or social freedoms. In rural areas, women perform much of the subsistence farming, all of the child rearing, and have little opportunity for education. The average educational level for women is markedly below that of men; only 6 percent are literate. At the university level, men predominate. Due to the military takeover, efforts by local NGO's to educate women on their civil rights and civic responsibilities have been suspended.

Children

Infant and child mortality is very high. In 1995 one child in four died before the age of 5 and one-third of children under the age of 5 were underweight.

As many as a few thousand RUF fighters are child soldiers who are as young as 8 years of age. They often are smaller physically than the rifles they carry. Abducted by the RUF from their villages, brutalized, and used to transport supplies, the children eventually become fighters. The armed forces also took boys off the streets of Freetown to expand its forces. The armed forces provided little or no training to the boys. This undisciplined and unsupervised group committed many atrocities. After the coup, parents began to ask the traditional hunter societies to initiate their young male children to protect

them from abduction and forcible recruitment by the RUF. Human rights groups believe that a large number of the children abducted into the various armed forces, or otherwise traumatized by the war as civilians, experience serious psychological problems.

In late February, RSLMF soldiers and Kamajohs cooperating in a government operation rescued several hundred war orphans, most from 9 to 15 years of age, living in the forests in Kailahun and Kenema districts. Most of the children fled to the forests after RUF rebels attacked and destroyed their villages 4 years earlier.

Occasional instances of ritual murders of boys and girls, as well as adults, associated with illegal secret societies, have been reported in the past. There were no reported cases during the year.

Female genital mutilation (FGM), which is condemned by international health experts as damaging to both physical and psychological health, is widely practiced on young women and girls, especially in traditional ethnic groups and among the less-educated. While UNICEF estimates the percentage of females who have undergone this procedure may be as high as 90 percent, local groups believe this figure is overstated.

In January the women's Bondo society initiated approximately 600 young women in the Grafton displaced persons camp near Freetown in a ceremony that included FGM. About 100 girls required medical treatment for complications including bleeding and serious infections caused by the multiple use of unclean knives or glass used in the procedure. An active press campaign by secret societies countered the well-publicized international effort against FGM. The 28-year-old woman abducted in 1996 by a secret society and subjected to FGM eventually found a lawyer to take her case, but now there are no functioning courts. On July 2, AFRC Chairman Johnny Paul Koroma told the executive council of the Bondo Society that he supports FGM and other traditional practices and that after the coup they could now perform these rites without hindrance.

People with Disabilities.

Questions of public facility access and discrimination against the disabled have not become public policy issues. No laws mandate accessibility to buildings or provide for other assistance for the disabled. While there does not appear to be outright discrimination against the disabled in housing or education, with the high rate of unemployment, few disabled persons work in offices or factories.

Many citizens suffered debilitating injuries during the war. Many had limbs cut off by RUF fighters. A few NGO's have provided prostheses, but the vast majority of victims remain without assistance of any kind.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Ethnic loyalty remains an important factor in government, the military, and business. Complaints of corruption within ethnic groups and ethnic discrimination in government appointments, contracts, military commissions, and promotions are common.

Residents of non-African descent face institutionalized political restrictions. The Constitution restricts citizenship to persons of patrilineal Negro-African descent. This constitutional restriction effectively denies citizenship to many long-time residents, notably the Lebanese community.

The Lebanese community was targeted for looting by military and RUF forces during the AFRC

takeover. Nigerian citizens were also targeted by the junta for harassment, arrest, and detention because of the dominant role played by Nigerian troops in the ECOMOG forces enforcing the U.N. and ECOWAS sanctions. RUF members killed two Nigerian citizens on September 9 in apparent retaliation for ECOMOG attacks against ships violating the ECOWAS embargo. In early September, at least 20 Nigerian citizens were accused of spying for ECOMOG, arrested, and held at Cockerill military headquarters. Another six Nigerians were arrested in mid-September as they traveled from Freetown to the interior of the country. The reason for their arrest is unknown.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

Under the elected Government, the now suspended Constitution provided for the right of association. workers, including civil servants, had the right to join trade unions of their choice. Unions were independent of the government. All labor unions had by custom joined the Sierra Leone Labor Congress (SLLC), but membership was voluntary. There was no legal prohibition against SLLC leadership holding political office, and leaders have held both elected and appointed government positions.

The Trade Union Act provides that any five persons may form a trade union by applying to the Registrar of Trade Unions, who has statutory powers under the act to approve the creation of trade unions. The Registrar may reject applications for several reasons, including an insufficient number of members, proposed representation in an industry already serviced by an existing union, or incomplete documentation. If the Registrar rejects an application, his decision may be appealed in the ordinary courts, but applicants seldom take such action. Approximately

60 percent of workers in urban areas, including government employees, are unionized, but unions have had little success in organizing workers in the agricultural and mining sectors.

Under the elected Government, unions had the right to strike without exception, but the Government could require 21 days' notice. Although union members may be fired for participating in even a lawful strike, no such incidents were reported. Unions were free to form federations and confederations and to affiliate internationally. The SLLC is a member of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, and the elected Government placed no restrictions on international travel or contacts of trade unionists.

Following the coup most businesses shut down and school teachers and many other public servants refused to return to work until the elected Government was restored. Leaders of the SLLC defied a junta demand that SLLC order all its members back to work. At year's end, most businesses and government offices and all schools remained closed as employees continued to refuse to return to work, despite warnings by the AFRC that those who did not return to work would be fired.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The legal framework for collective bargaining is the Regulation of Wages and Industrial Relations Act. Collective bargaining must take place in trade group negotiating councils, each of which has an equal number of employer and worker representatives. Most enterprises are covered by collective bargaining agreements on wages and working conditions. The SLLC provides assistance to unions in preparation for negotiations. In case of a deadlock, the Government may intervene. It has not, however, used decrees to prevent strikes.

No law prohibits retribution against strikers. Should an employee be fired for union activities, the individual may file a complaint with a labor tribunal and seek reinstatement. Complaints of discrimination against unions are made to an arbitration tribunal. Individual trade unions investigate alleged violations of work conditions to try to ensure that employers take the necessary steps to correct abuses.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The suspended Constitution prohibited forced and bonded labor, including that by children. However, under the Chiefdom's Council Act, compulsory labor may be imposed by individual chiefs, requiring members of their villages to contribute to the improvement of common areas. This practice exists only in rural areas. There is no penalty for noncompliance.

The elected Government did not require compulsory labor. However, an old decree requires that homeowners, businessmen, and vendors clean and maintain their premises. Failure to comply is punishable by fine or imprisonment. The last Saturday of each month is declared a National Cleaning Day. There have been reports of security forces publicly humiliating citizens to ensure compliance.

The AFRC forcibly impressed teenage boys into military service. The RUF frequently abducted villagers, including children, during its attacks and forced the abductees into involuntary servitude as laborers for the RUF. Many of the children eventually became fighters for the RUF. This continued even after the RUF joined the AFRC junta.

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The minimum age for employment is officially 18 years, but in practice there is no enforcement because there is no government entity specifically charged with this task. Children routinely assist in family businesses, especially those of vendors and petty traders. In rural areas, children work seasonally on family subsistence farms.

Because the adult unemployment rate is high (an estimated

70 percent in some areas), few children are involved in the industrial sector. There have been reports that young children have been hired by foreign employers to work as domestics overseas at extremely low wages and in poor conditions. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is responsible for reviewing overseas work applications to see that no one under the age of 14 is employed for this purpose and to enforce certain wage standards.

The suspended Constitution prohibited forced and bonded labor, including that by children; however, there was some compulsory labor in rural areas (see Section 6.c.). The AFRC forcibly impressed teenage boys into military service.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no minimum wage. Purchasing power declined drastically as incomes dropped and inflation rose to

40 percent. Most workers have to pool incomes with their extended families and engage in subsistence

food production to maintain a minimum standard of living. The Government's suggested standard workweek is 38 hours, but most workweeks for the few people who have jobs exceed 38 hours. The Government sets health and safety standards, but the standards are outmoded and often not enforced. The Health and Safety Division of the Department of Labor has inspection and enforcement responsibility, but the lack of funding and transportation limit its effectiveness.

Health and safety regulations are included in collective bargaining agreements, but there is no evidence of systematic enforcement of those health and safety standards. Trade unions provide the only protection for workers who file complaints about working conditions. Initially, a union makes a formal complaint about a hazardous work condition. If this is rejected, the union may issue a

21-day strike notice. If workers remove themselves from dangerous work situations without making a formal complaint, they risk being fired.

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